**The Wood Turtle**

The wood turtle is a medium sized semi-aquatic turtle that ranges between 16 and 25 cm in length. The brown to grayish-brown upper shell (carapace) of the wood turtle is heavily sculpted, with a raised edge running down the centre of the shell. Each scute on the carapace has a raised pyramidal ridge of circular growth rings, often with black and yellow lines radiating from the apex. The underside of the shell (plastron) is yellow with dark blotches, has a V-shaped notch at the base of the tail, and lacks a hinge. The skin on the head and upper body is dark brown; the skin on the throat, tail and underside of the forelegs is characteristically yellow, orange or red.

*Most people are surprised to learn that wood turtles can live for over 50 years in the wild. On average, captive wood turtles reach over 52 years and wild turtles reach over 30 years. The turtles reach sexual maturity when they are between 14 and 18. Females lay one clutch of between four and 18 eggs per year and may not lay eggs every year.*

**Wood Turtle Diet**

The wood turtle is an omnivore. In the case of the Wood Turtle, plant matter consumed in the wild might include grasses, algae, alder leaves, willow leaves, birch leaves, strawberries, violets, dandelions, plantain, corn, raspberries, blueberries, mosses, and mushrooms. Turtles however prefer animal matter over most plant matter. Animal matter consumed includes earthworms, slugs, leeches, snails, various insects, beetles, tadpoles, frogs, and newborn mice, trout, and small birds.

**Wood Turtle Predators**

Wood turtles are preyed upon by a wide variety of animals. Some of the more common predators of the wood turtle include raccoons, skunks, opossums, hawks, eagles, foxes, and porcupines.

**Distribution of the Wood Turtle**

The wood turtles range is restricted to northeastern North America. The wood turtle is found in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, south to Virginia, and west through southern Québec, south and north-central Ontario, and New York, to northern Michigan, Wisconsin, eastern Minnesota, and northeastern Iowa.

**Habitat Requirements**

Wood turtles are generally found in riparian areas or flood plains. Wood turtles need three key habitat components: a stream or river, a sandy nesting substrate, and a forested area.

**1. A Stream or River**

Wood turtles need access to water for thermoregulation, movement, hibernation and mating. In spring when temperatures are cool, the turtles are often found associated with clear, moderately flowing streams, creeks or rivers. At this time, they usually overnight in the water, but spend much time during the day on land, basking on along the shore. Wood turtles prefer hard-bottomed streams and rivers composed of sand or gravel, and avoid clay or muck-bottomed drainage. Clear medium sized (7 to 100 feet wide) rivers and streams are ideal.

**2. Sandy Nesting Substrate**

Wood turtles nest in sand or sand-gravel areas like sand bars, sand points, and cut banks along or in the river. They will also use artificial nesting sites (e.g. gravel pits, logging roads, road shoulders, bridge crossings, residential settlements) when they are available.

**3. Forest**

The wood turtle is the most terrestrial of the freshwater turtles in the family Emydidae. In summer when temperatures are warmer, wood turtles spend more time on land. Wood turtles make their home in shaded, wet-mesic forested (coniferous or deciduous) flood plains or riparian areas. The turtles use dense mixtures of low-growing vegetation for foraging, and bask in sunlit openings.

**Amount of Habitat Wood Turtles Use**

Wood turtles range over relatively small areas. These home ranges tend to increase with increasing latitude. This increase in home range size is likely due to the lower productivity in northern regions, forcing animals to move further in search of food. It has also been suggested that home ranges are less restricted in the north because of less extensive habitat alteration. Limited evidence from Musquodoboit and St. Mary’s rivers in Nova Scotia supports this suggestion.

In the Mauricie region of Quebec, at the northern limit of the species range, the wood turtle has an average home range of 28.3 ha. Researchers reported an average home range of 24.3 ha in Algonquin Park, Ontario. In the Centre County region of Pennsylvania home range was substantially smaller at an average of 4.32 ha.